(a) whether it is a fact that Government has set 7 per cent tele-density target by the year 2005 ;

(b) whether the present tele-density is only 2.4 per cent ; and

(c) if so, what are Government's plans to achieve their target ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) and (c) The New Telecom Policy 1999 envisage teledensity of 7 % by the year 2005. In order to achieve this target it would be necessary to provide 754 lakhs DELs including Mobile telephone by the year 2005 to achieve this target of teledensity. The present status of number of telepohone including mobile phones is 284.32 lakhs which implies an addition of 469.68 lakhs telephones during 2000 to 2005. The contribution from Private Sector in mobile as well as fixed telephone connections is also envisaged in the New Telecom Policy 1999. The telephone density for fixed telephones as on 31-3-2000 is 2.67 per 100 persons and the teledensity including mobile phones as on 31-3-2000 is 2.85 per 100 persons. Government proposes to increase the Annual Plan targets for providing new telephone connections every year, depending on demand.

Slashing of long distance call charges

3840. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA : Will the MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that the Telecom Commission policy making and planning body for the telecom sector including DoT and DTS favours slashing of long distance charges to bring them in line with the rates prevailing abroad ; and

(b) if so, what is the progress made in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) and (b) As per section 11(2) of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997, fixation of tariff for various telecom services is the responsibility of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) an independent regulator. The TRAI issued a Tarrif Order 1999 on March 9, 1999 reducing *inter-alia* domestic long distance rates by about 20% which the Department of Telecom Services, as a service provider, has implemented with effect from 01-05-1999.